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# GOVERNING EMOTIONS. HUSSERL AND PERSONAL VOCATION

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## *abstract*

*Husserl's work contains a central ethical question: the creation of a personal order in relation to values and their cognition. An order in which the fundamental structure of the actual idea of a person is revealed: that of being the essential tie between feeling, motivation of volition and logical-argumentative coherence. This value is felt emotionally but the true understanding of the value only occurs in rational choice, when feeling is concretely translated into value; only when the intellect recognises what has become manifest in emotional acts, does the value actually become such and can act as a motivation for rational action. As its consequent result, the ability of evaluation makes use of the understanding of the meaning of the personal unit: the actual faculty of self-evaluation and self-determination, of self-regulation towards the good and right. It is the theme of centrality that the process of self-formation as the education of the self assumes in Husserlian ethical discourse as the capacity to relate the general norm to one's own order of values, to one's best, that corresponds to the very question of personal vocation according to Husserl. This is certainly an individual ideal but at the same time, also a social ideal since the actual life of a community can take on the form of an ethical life characterised by collective renewal, but only on the basis of the capacity for individual renewal.*

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## *keywords*

Vocation, value, ethics, reason, person

“Ich, als der ich bin, kann mich von diesem Reich des Schönen (und, praktisch gesprochen, des im reinen Sinne Guten) nicht trennen, es verwirklichen ist meine Sache, hier ist das Reich meiner Berufspflichten” (Husserl 1959, 16).

- Personal Order** 1. At the beginning of *Ordo Amoris* Max Scheler speaks of an interminable process in which my action, passions, volitions and cognitive perception are involved, and from which any kind of rightness, falsity or distortion of my life and my action may be determined, “ob es eine *objektiv rechte Ordnung* dieser Regungen meiner Liebe und meines Hasses, meiner Neigung und Abneigung, meines mannigfaltigen Interesses an den Dingen dieser Welt gibt, und ob es möglich sei, diesen “*ordo amoris*” meinem Gemüte einzuprägen” (Scheler 1986, 347). It is not difficult to glimpse a fundamental phenomenological theme of Schelerian thought behind this statement, in other words, that each individual experience is rooted in the world of values and the concealment of the *nucleus* that underlies each personal action in those roots.

According to Scheler, the personal radication in the world of values, its order or possible disorder, corresponds “auf die besondere Art des Aufbaus seiner Liebes- und Haßakte und Liebes- und Haßpotenzen” (Scheler 1986, 348), and also represents a sort of fundamental rule for reciprocal recognition: “wer den *ordo amoris* eines Menschen hat, hat den Menschen” (Scheler 1986, 348), those who understand the *ordo amoris* of another person, understand the fundamental ethical value, the fundamental structure of values of his individual personal being.

Following the period of his *Logical Investigations*, the *binding* relationship between reason, knowledge and the world of values was a central subject for Husserl as well. Using words that evoke the themes of Scheler’s *ordo amoris*, Husserl asks himself: “wie soll ich mein Leben und Streben vernünftig ordnen, wie dem quälenden Zwiespalt mit mir selbst entgehen, wie dem berechtigten Tadel der Mitmenschen? Wie kann ich mein ganzes Leben zu einem schönem und guten gestalten und, wie der traditionelle Ausdruck lautet, wie die echte Eudaimonie, die wahre Glückseligkeit, erlangen?” (Husserl 1988, 11).

In a passage in the *Formalismusbuch*, Scheler describes the axiological nuance of an object (*Wertnuance*) as the “*Medium*”, which precedes it and is the first messenger (*der erste Bote*) of its image and conceptual meaning (cf. Scheler 1980, 40). Husserl also believes that the value *informs* itself of the actual *object* and is *perceived* through specific emotional acts. In Husserl’s analyses this interweaving is also essential between the volitional motivational sphere that involves the values and the emotive sphere through which they are displayed, and are perceived and recognised as such. In view of these *schelerian suggestions*, we shall try to discuss in Husserl, albeit generally, the creation of a personal order in relation to values and their cognition. An order in which the fundamental structure of the actual idea of *personal vocation* is revealed: that of being the essential tie between the emotional sphere (*Gemüt*), the motivation of volition and logical-argumentative coherence.

By analysing value, according to Husserl, the emotive sphere is not only an anti-predicative dimension of cognitive judgement but also a condition for its concrete enrichment of meaning. Via the value and the sphere of emotive perception (*Fühlen*) it is tied to, the restricted, formal meaning of the predicative enunciation can also be expanded, or *coloured*. For example, “das Wohlgefallen an einer Blume (...) Vom Gefallen selbst her kommt über den durch die Wahrnehmung geleferteten Merkmalgehalt hinaus der gesehenen Blume etwas zu, sie nimmt von daher an, nämlich den Charakter des “reizend”, “schön”, “lieblich” u.dgl. Leicht gehen wir aus der Einstellung des gefallens, der pure Ichzuwendung im Gemüte, über in die Urteilstellung, in der das “schön”, das “reizend” nun in einem erfahrenden Glauben erfaßt und dann (...) prädiiziert wird. Alle solchen Prädikate haben also vorprädikativ und vor der erfassenden Erfahrung ihren Ursprung im Gemüte; ebenso wie andere Prädikate, die des Guten und Schlechten, des Nützlichen oder Zweckmäßigen oder Schädlichen, in dem mit dem wertenden Gemüt verbundenen Wille ihre Quelle haben” (Husserl 1959, 24).

Unlike Kant, according to Husserl, aesthetic judgement can be translated into cognitive judgement. And this may occur thanks to the dual aspect of the value: that of becoming manifest in the emotive sphere and the correlated one of it becoming concrete through the rational choice of the agent volition that recognises it as such and *appropriates* it as its fundamental *motive*. As in the aforementioned example, it is the value that acts as a bridge, permitting the transition from the dimension of the aesthetic feeling to that of the cognitive, from the feeling of pleasure caused by the beautiful to the cognition of that feeling as a value of beauty.

In its immediacy the emotive sphere is therefore the manifestation of the value that, in turn, reveals itself as a condition for more detailed cognitive experience and its being able to express itself in predicative enunciations. Husserl sees this as a characteristic that can be extended to all the sciences as human forms of culture, representing their unique characteristic: “Alle Kulturwissenschaften im spezifischen Sinn der Wissenschaften von der Kulturgebildeten haben statt bloßer Natur mit Prädikaten bloßer Natur gerade solche aus dem Gemüt stammenden, also auf das wertend und wollend gestaltende Subjekt zurückweisende Prädikate in ihrem thematischen Bereich” (Husserl 1959, 25).

The value is therefore perceived emotionally but the true understanding of the value only takes place in rational decision, in other words when the emotion is concretely translated into value: only when the intellect recognises what has become manifest in emotional acts as a value, does the value actually become such. In a manner of speaking, first of all there is an ingenuous, unreflected attitude of the value in its manifestation through the emotional sphere, followed by a positive moment, correlated to the former, in which the value is authentically perceived and can concretely be desired and act as a motivation for rational action.

According to Husserl, artistic creation and its relationship with the value of beauty comprises an intentional movement that starts with the affective perception of the value being offered in the emotive sphere; thanks to its cognition it becomes the guiding principle of the practical activity, the implementation of which results in the total fulfilment and total satisfaction (*Erfüllung*) of the original intuition. “Das Gemüt ist es, das rein in sich wertet, und der handelnde Wille, der rein in sich oder als solcher das Schöne gestaltet. Die Wahrheit, die Echtheit des Wertes und dann des Werkes bekundet sich ursprünglich naiv wiederum im Gemüt, in der reinen Befriedigung, wie praktische Realisierung des Schönen sich in der fundierten Befriedigung der Erzielung bekundet” (Husserl 1959, 25).

However, it must be pointed out that according to Husserl, there is also a superior instance: that of the *responsibility of knowledge*, which, through the different ways of knowing, that of judgement and of its logical forms, can lead the intuition of the value to evident and general rules.

There is a profound analogy, a logical analogy between knowledge and evaluation, between cognitive consciousness and the emotive and volitive.

## 2. Ethics and Logic

Both presuppose an *intentional stance*<sup>1</sup>, that is, the question of correctness or incorrectness of one's own intentions and validity; in other words, they presuppose the *question of value*. This is a premise they both clearly have in common but it must not lead to confusion regarding their different quality, their different specific-essential difference, which, according to Husserl characterises the different ways of experiences of consciousness (cf. Husserl 1988, 61 and following). As is generally known, according to Husserl, the meaning of what is intentionally thought varies in the way it is thought. For example, the consciousness of the memory of a landscape is clearly different to the perception of a current experience, but this does not mean that both do not have their own rational legitimacy; on the contrary, they are simply different experiences in which the landscape is the object of an experience of retention in the one case and of perception in the other (cf., for example Husserl 1976, § 136).

It is precisely the need in itself for rational comprehension that must therefore not confuse emotive with logical reasoning. In his *Logical Investigations* Husserl was already discussing the confusion of the two fields with the two extremes he highlighted: the psychologistic in which logical reasoning is transferred to the emotional sphere, translating it into a sort of sentimentalism that is displayed only in feeling, and the intellectualistic that tends to exclude any emotive dimension in the rational sphere, reducing it to pure logical activity. However, the crucial point, which can certainly not be taken for granted, is that in which logical reason is necessary for the clarification of the emotive and volitive sphere. "Die logische Vernunft muß also gleichsam auf das Feld der praktischen hinblicken, muß dieser das Auge des Intellekts geben" (Husserl 1988, 64).

As mentioned earlier, with its unique qualities axiological reason is only displayed thanks to emotive acts, and only on the basis of the experience of emotive consciousness. The emotive sphere therefore governs decisions, evaluations and the recognition of contents of value, requiring a specific stance, in other words, requiring they be highlighted, ascertained, determined, and objectivised in the specific meaning of the term that is

1 The underlying question here concerns the famous distinction, found in the Fifth Logical Investigation, between objectivising acts, experiences of consciousness in which an object becomes directly manifest and non-objectivising acts that depend from the former owing to the relationship with the object, as is the case with volitive-emotional acts. Thanks to the theme of value and its volition, Husserl gradually attenuates this distinction, and also expands the direct nature that competes with the objectivising acts to the emotive and volitive experiences – although in a much broader sense – as can be seen clearly in paragraph 17 of *Ideen I*, (cf. Husserl 1913, 390, Husserl 1976, 241-245).

one of its specific tasks. In a certain sense it is up to logic to reveal what is already present in the emotive experience as it does not invent anything since, “die axiologische Vernunft mit ihren Beständen ist sozusagen sich selbst verborgen” (Husserl 1988, 63). According to Husserl, compared to the other rational fields, logical reason has an extraordinary *normative* prerogative: that of predicating the laws of correctness and inference not only as far as its only field is concerned, but also regarding every other sphere of reason. Logic therefore offers practical reasoning an argumentative ability, *giving voice to it* and *clearly showing* its rational contents without which it would be totally blind (cf. Husserl 1988, 68-69).

However, there is another aspect that binds logical theoretical reason (*theoretische Vernunft*) to practical reason and it is according to this aspect that practical reason has to act in the form of rational coherence (*in Gestalt vernünftiger Konsequenz walten*) (cf. Husserl 2004, 4-5). Although there are parallels so that both in theoretical reason and practical reason one talks of correct and incorrect, value and valueless, all of this takes place in different meanings as the value of a logical inference obviously has a different meaning to that of the adequacy of the relationship between the means and purpose to achieve an objective. The decisive question practical and theoretical reason have in common is, on the other hand, a question of right: that is, to what extent their assertions can be proven and justified. However, for practical reason the question of fact, i.e. which fundamental objectives are guiding human action, is not particularly fundamental whereas that of value is, i.e. if those objectives have to be followed since they actually deserve to be pursued (cf. Husserl 2004, 6). This then raises a further question for Husserl, not only querying the single fulfilment of single objectives, but the true ethical question that extends the reason of individual aims and volitions to their subordination to a supreme end, the *normative* issue par excellence: that of the order of our values that each *living will* has to fulfil to achieve one's best.

The order of values – and the determination of the will underlying them – clearly moves Husserl's discussion from the analogy between theoretical and practical reason to the sphere of personal ethics: “Etisch” nennen wir nicht nur Wollungen und Handlungen mit ihren Zielen, sondern auch bleibende Gesinnungen in der Persönlichkeit als habituelle Willensrichtungen. (...) So nennen wir mancherlei Freude, Trauer bald, “schön”, edel, bald böse, niedrig, gemein, und sehen darin etische Prädikate, und ebenso entsprechende Gesinnungen, habituelle Gefühlsrichtungen wie Liebe und

Hass. Wir beurteilen so die sämtliche habituellen Gemütseigenschaften und zusammengefasst den ganzen “Charakter” einer Person als etisch oder etisch verwerflich (...)und so schließlich und ganz besonders die Person selbst” (Husserl 2004, 8).

Here the capacity to evaluate is not only transformed into the question of understanding the meaning of the personal unit, the unit of a human life in its entirety, but also as the very faculty of self-evaluation (*Selbstbewertung*) and self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*). This is the centrality that the process of personal self-formation as the education of the self assumes in Husserl’s ethic discourse as is the capacity of recognising the relationship between the rule and one’s own personal order of values (cf. Husserl 2004, 9).

There is nothing abstract or purely formal about these rules. But they are the constant content of the capacity itself to know how to recognise and perceive them as personal rules. In other words, they underlie knowing how to identify what I regard as an absolute obligation, the *having to be* in my individual personal declination that according to Husserl corresponds to my personal vocation for my best. This capacity consists in knowing how to compare the general rule with the issues that affect us directly and involve the order of our values and preferences very closely. For example, “die konkrete etische Frage, “Wie soll ich mein Leben zu einem wahrhaft guten gestalten?” schließt dann ja die Frage in sich: ‘Ist meine Sache, das für mich absolut Gesollte, den wissenschaftlichen Beruf zu ergreifen oder nicht vielmehr einen praktischen Beruf?’” (Husserl 2004, 9).

3. **Personal Vocation** There is therefore also a fundamental aspect that ties the value to reason: it is that of acting as a release from the passive, pulsional reality of one’s own affects and inclinations whilst requesting *government* through the free expression of the personality that *wants* to understand both, giving them form and then translating them into effective values, that is, in concrete motivations of a conscious and rational act. In other words, reduced to essential terms, this is the *teleological* meaning of ethical life according to Husserl, and of the main weight the word vocation (*Berufung*) acquires: that of the supreme aim, the fulfilment of oneself, which each individual is called to without hindrance in the creation of his/her own order of values. This is, however, an order that has to be able to regenerate itself in continuation in a gradual process that Husserl believes is only possible on the basis of the ideal rule of an absolute rational *telos*: a pole that transcends any finiteness and, at the same time, an infinite desire, “das jeder etische Mensch in sich trägt,

das er unendlich ersehnt und liebt und von dem er sich immerzu unendlich fern weiß” (Husserl 1989, 34). *Telos* that is the counter melody to the finite dimension of the continuous inclination towards *the best man possible*, to the *immerwieder* of that science-consciousness that on each occasion presents itself to the ethical subject as the best possible (cf. Husserl 1989, 30, 40).

This all corresponds to the essential nature of human life which is that of tending towards the good, always aiming at one’s best, aspiring to the affirmation of positive values even in every negative aspiration, as is the case when, for example, one wants to flee from sensitive pain that actually proves to be just a passage towards positive aspiration: “Die Schmerzlosigkeit, in der das Wegstreben sich entspannt - ebenso wie die Lustlosigkeit im Falle der letzten Entspannung des Luststrebens durch Auskosten des genossenen Wertes, ‘bis zur Neige’ -, motiviert alsbald neue positive Strebungen, darauf gerichtet, die entstandene Leere mit positiv Wertigem auszufüllen” (Husserl 1989, 25).

Despite the continuation of disappointment and defeat, according to Husserl each existential-personal dimension always comprises a fight for a life full of value, a life that can be translated into ethical life when the subject is no longer relegated to the lowest rank, submitted to the passive theatre of motivational forces fighting with one another, but when it tries to embrace in its entirety the view of its own life and give it, with true consciousness, a satisfying government, a complete form of the order of one’s own values, the form of a happy life (cf. Husserl 1989, 25).

Against any relativism whilst against any abstract universalism, according to Husserl each destiny is therefore inscribed in one’s own individual history, in free personal volition, and on this basis, also in collective volition. This is therefore a destiny that always strives towards the formation of an order of personal values and their consequent hierarchy, one that can never be absolute, but must always follow the path that is constantly full of difficulties of individual renewal in which the superior values absorb the inferior ones in a process of continuous development and direct themselves according to the ideal paradigm of knowledge and science, in which the truths produced in the lower levels are preserved and merge with the theories of the upper levels (cf. Husserl 1959, 13-14).

The ideal of knowledge is therefore not an abstract ideal but one that is always in movement of the *consciousness of the self* (*Selbstbewußtsein*).



Self-awareness, being constantly directed towards oneself, marks the detachment from the immediacy of an ingenuous life that is totally submerged in one's own environment (*Umwelt*). It is the starting point for one's own *self-evaluation* (*Selbstbewertung*) that has to reflect on the possibility of success or failure, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, happiness or unhappiness that, in turn, comprise the premise for one's practical self-determination (*praktische Selbstbestimmung*) (cf. HUA XXVII, 34-35).

The origin of the normative ideal of knowledge of the self remains an ingenuous consciousness with its *content* of feeling obliged to *overcome* it; this is a duty that is not limited to the specific domain of one's own competence, such as, for example, the one followed by a scientist in the specific field of knowledge, a normative coherence towards the constant re-definition of one's own knowledge but might be completely ingenuous in other domains of one's own life. According to Husserl this ideal is the normative paradigm par excellence that embraces life in all its activities, and in all its existential fields.

The essence of volition and ethical action therefore mainly consists in the fact of not being an ingenuous act and not even being a purely voluntaristic need: its rational motivation lies in the awareness of one's own normative capacity (*im Bewusstsein seiner Normhaftigkeit*), which is what motivates it (cf. Husserl 2004, 247). However, on its own, this normative capacity is not sufficient to establish an ethical life, as even a criminal, for example, could set himself and follow criminal objectives with both coherence and method for entire stretches of his existence. More fundamentally, the true ethical sense is that of questioning the possibility of directing one's own life towards what is good and right in a manner that is inseparable from the study of one's best, the search for the implementation of one's own personal vocation: "Ich will mein Leben, mein ganzes Leben von nun ab in allen seinen Akten und mit seinem gesamten Erlebnisgehalt so leben, dass es mein bestmögliches Leben sei; mein bestmögliches, d.h. das bestmögliche, das ich kann" (Husserl 2004, 252).

According to Husserl, a subject is such in its concise sense when it is truly the subject of volition (*Willenssubjekt*): in other words, when it no longer passively follows the course of affect and pulsions, but *evaluates* itself as a subject of volition. When coherently following or neglecting one's own vocation, subjects are faced with their own personal choice through which they can evaluate themselves and act correctly or incorrectly (cf. Husserl 1989, 24). This is

certainly an individual ideal but according to Husserl, at the same time also a social ideal since the very life of a community can take on the form of an ethical life characterised by collective renewal, only on the basis of the ability to individual renewal that is then revealed as its necessary and indispensable premise (cf. Husserl 1989, 22-23).

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